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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, February 28, 2007

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Michigan Report

February 27, 2007

SENATE COMMITTEE REPORTS CHILD WELFARE BILLS

The Senate Health and Family Services Committee unanimously reported three bills on Tuesday that deal with child abuse and child welfare to the full Senate.

[SB 183](#) would change the Child Protection Law so the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services can access information on reports of child abuse or neglect in a central database.

The database, which is required by the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, has not yet been established.

Ron Hicks, legislative liaison from the Department of Human Services, said the department had worked with bill sponsor [Sen. Alan Sanborn](#) (R-Richmond) on the bill and weren't opposed to it.

[SB 271](#) would require people applying or reapplying to operate a foster family home or group home to undergo a criminal history and FBI records check, as well as an Internet criminal history access tool check, by October 1. It would also require people currently holding licenses to have criminal background checks within one year after the bill goes into effect.

Jeff Cobb, an aide to bill sponsor [Sen. Gerald VanWoerkom](#) (R-Muskegon), said the bill would help protect children in the foster care system and said funding was already available in Governor Jennifer Granholm's proposed budget.

Cobb fielded questions from committee members about the fact that the Department of Human Services would pay for the checks at \$70 per person, totaling about \$770,000, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

"We didn't want to place the burden on families. We want to encourage them to be foster parents," Mr. Cobb said.

James Gale, director of the Office of Children and Adult Licensing, said they support the bill but would like to make several changes before it gets to the floor, including extending the deadline for having the checks completed to January 1, 2008 and extending the checks to people adopting children.

Mr. Gale would also like to see the bill changed so once someone is fingerprinted during their criminal check, the scan would go to the Michigan State Police and if there was a new charge against the person, the licensing agency would be notified.

There was some debate about the cost of doing criminal checks for both foster and adoptive parents but Mr. Gale said the department would continue to work with Mr. VanWoerkom on the bill before it makes it to the Senate.

The final bill approved by the committee was [SB 273](#), which would change the Child Protection Law so DHS would have to notify a prosecuting attorney or start an investigation within 24 hours on reports of suspected child abuse, child sexually abusive activity, criminal sexual conduct or attempted conduct or if there is a drug lab violation with methamphetamine. It also applies if there are indications the abuse was committed by someone who doesn't care for the child or if the child's been exposed to methamphetamine production.

A previous version of the bill was signed into law last session, but another piece of legislation dealing with the same part of the law erased the bill, meaning it had to be reintroduced.

Mr. Hicks said they don't oppose the bill and worked with [Sen. Bill Hardiman](#) (R-Kentwood), who sponsored the bill, on some of the language.

"We want to make sure the right people are contacted when there's child abuse," Mr. Hardiman said.

Senate Committee Moves Child Protection Bill

MIRS, February 27, 2007

The Senate Families and Human Services Committee moved a bill that would help protect foster children from sex offenders.

SB 0271, introduced by Sen. Gerry **VAN WOERKOM** (R-Norton Shores), would require criminal history and record checks of all current licensees, all individuals seeking a license and those seeking a renewal license for a foster family or foster family group home.

"This legislation is necessary because it will help protect our children," Van Woerkom said. "We passed the Student Safety Initiative, which became effective last year, to protect our children from sexual offenders and predators in schools and daycare facilities. This bill will do the same thing for children in foster homes."

The Senate passed similar legislation last fall, but it wasn't taken up by the House.

The bill would also:

- Prevent licensure for those with sex crime convictions
- Require that the Department of Human Services perform a criminal background check on all persons over the age of 18 residing in the foster family or foster family group home
- Require all licensees to report arraignments for any felony and certain misdemeanor crimes



Parolee is guilty in girl's rape

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

A prison parolee admitted Tuesday he raped his girlfriend's 5-year-old daughter in Sandstone Township.

George McMonigal, 24, pleaded guilty to first-degree criminal sexual conduct. Prosecutors will dismiss a second rape charge when Circuit Judge Edward Grant sentences him April 5.

Sheriff's investigators alleged McMonigal was baby-sitting the girl Jan. 17 when he performed a sex act on her. The girl told her mother about the sexual assault when she arrived home from work.

McMonigal is one of Prosecutor Hank Zavislak's poster boys in arguing against the Department of Corrections releasing nonviolent offenders before the parole board normally would do so.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has proposed releasing more than 5,000 people convicted of nonviolent crimes as part of a plan to balance the state's budget.

McMonigal was sentenced in June 1999 to up to 10 years in prison for breaking and entering a building.

The parole board released him after serving his minimum sentence on Oct. 10, 2006. He was to be supervised by parole agents until February 2008.

His parole was revoked upon his arrest, and he was returned to prison.

Grant could sentence McMonigal to any number of years up to life in prison.

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February 28, 2007

Obesity sparks custody case

Fearing she'll lose her overweight son, mom vows to protect the 8-year-old's health.

Thomas Wagner / Associated Press

LONDON -- A mother who feared she might lose custody of her obese 8-year-old son unless he lost weight was allowed to keep the boy after striking a deal Tuesday with social workers to safeguard his welfare.

The case has set off a debate over child obesity and raised questions about whether genetics, junk food or bad parenting is to blame.

Connor McCreaddie of Wallsend in northeastern England weighs 218 pounds, four times the weight of a healthy child his age.

Connor and his mother, Nicola McKeown, 35, attended a child protection meeting Tuesday with North Tyneside Council officials.

Before it began, McKeown, a single mother of two, said she hoped she would not lose custody of her son.

"I'm not too good, and I'm very nervous about the meeting. I'm hoping for the best," she said.

Afterward, the Local Safeguarding Children Board issued a statement saying "we have made a formal agreement with the family to safeguard and promote the child's welfare."

The agency provided no details about what Connor or his mother would have to do to fight his obesity.

The hearing was held under the Children Act, which places a duty on the local authority to conduct an inquiry if it has "reasonable cause to suspect that a child ... in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm."

The boy's case attracted national attention after his mother allowed an ITV News crew to film his day-to-day life for a month.

When he was 2 1/2, Connor was too heavy for his mother to pick him up, and at 5, he weighed more than 126 pounds, said the Journal, a regional newspaper. Now the boy, who is tall for his age at 5 feet, wears adult clothes and size eight shoes, the newspaper said.

Sky TV showed footage of Connor's mother serving him meals of fries, meat and buttered bread.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Ruling on schools, gays laudable

Like any minority, they have right to be protected

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Like all too many school districts, Toms River, N.J., has done a poor job of protecting gay students from bullying. According to the New Jersey Supreme Court, the district punished students for being one minute late for class, but made harassing another child for being gay punishable only after a third offense.

In a landmark ruling this week, the court unanimously held that public school districts like Toms River's are liable for damages if they fail to take reasonable steps to stop prolonged anti-gay harassment of a student by another student. It correctly found that students had a right to be protected against this sort of abuse.

The decision changes the legal landscape in New Jersey, and we hope it will be the start of a new national approach to the problem.

A study by the National Mental Health Association a few years ago found that more than three-quarters of teenagers reported that students who were gay or thought to be gay were teased and bullied in their schools and communities.

The anonymous student who brought the suit against Toms River schools clearly deserved better. He complained of being taunted almost daily from fourth grade on. In high school, he was physically attacked twice, and he said he eventually had to change schools. School administrators disciplined the worst offenders, but failed to address the overall school climate by taking such basic steps as talking to parents and holding student assemblies to make it clear that harassment would not be tolerated.

The court's ruling provides much-needed support to some of the nation's most vulnerable young people, and it sets a worthy standard for courts and educators nationwide.

The New York Times

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Spencer agrees to plea deal

STACY LANGLEY, The Huron Daily Tribune

02/27/2007

BAD AXE — A jury trial slated to get under way Wednesday morning in Huron County Circuit Court was canceled after a plea agreement was reached with a 27-year-old Port Austin Township man.

Anthony M. Spencer was facing two felony charges, possession with intent to deliver cocaine less than 50 grams and possession of a controlled substance less than 25 grams.

In a plea agreement between the Huron County Prosecutor's Office and Spencer's Bad Axe Attorney James Woodworth, Spencer agreed to plead guilty to possession with intent to deliver cocaine less than 50 grams. The charge carries a possible sentence of up to 20 years in prison and/or a \$25,000 fine.

In return for Spencer's guilty plea, the felony charge of possession of a controlled substance less than 25 grams and two misdemeanor charges of possession of marijuana and maintaining a drug house will be dismissed at the time of sentencing April 16. Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner also noted in court he will not pursue a habitual offender charge that would have enhanced Spencer's possible prison sentence.

Spencer told the court Monday that on Dec. 5 he possessed cocaine at his house in Port Austin Township with the intent to "get rid of it" by "selling it" (the cocaine). He remains lodged in the Huron County Jail.

Gaertner said Spencer's arrest came after a three-month drug investigation by the Huron County Sheriff's Office. At the time of Spencer's arrest on Dec. 5 at his 3221 Port Austin Road home, two other Port Austin men, ages 34 and 24, as well as Spencer's 25-year-old girlfriend Alison Miller, were inside the apartment.

Seized in the raid was suspected crack cocaine, numerous pills and marijuana, along with other drug paraphernalia and some cash.

The two Port Austin men were questioned and released. They have not been charged yet. Miller, who was eight months pregnant at the time of the raid, also was questioned. No charges have been filed against her at this time.

Gaertner said Monday charges against Miller are "forthcoming."

She currently has unrelated charges pending for possession of drug paraphernalia in Macomb County and a felony charge for grand theft pending in Florida.

According to Huron County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Elizabeth V. Weisenbach, Miller's baby was born Jan. 17 addicted to opiates, barbiturates and cocaine and has since been placed by the Department of Human Services with a Huron County foster family. Miller remains free on bond and is allowed supervised visitation with her child.

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Source: [Drake University](#)

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Foster Children, Students Work to Pass Sibling Visitation Law

Libraries

Life News (Social and Behavioral Sciences)

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Contact Information*Available for logged-in reporters only***Description**

Law school students and faculty at Drake University are trying to improve children's rights in Iowa by trying out a novel idea -- asking foster children themselves what laws need to be changed to better protect them, and then enlisting those foster children to lobby lawmakers to pass that legislation.

Newswise — Law school students and faculty at Drake University are trying to improve children's rights in Iowa by trying out a novel idea -- asking foster children themselves what laws need to be changed to better protect them, and then enlisting those foster children to lobby lawmakers to pass that legislation.

The legislation the foster children and law students are working to get passed would mandate visitation rights for siblings who are split up and placed into foster homes, and ensure that foster parents receive training about the need to accommodate those visits.

Jerry Foxhoven, director of the Middleton Center for Children's Rights at Drake Law School and the former executive officer of the Iowa Child Advocacy Board, said ensuring sibling visitation rights was by far the most important issue that emerged in conversations with more than 100 foster children in the Greater Des Moines area.

"It was absolutely unanimous that they wanted to do something on this issue," Foxhoven said.

If the bill passes, Iowa would be one of the few states in the nation to legally guarantee children the right to visit each other if they are split up by the courts.

"Very few states have sibling visitation laws," Foxhoven said. "Most would say 'We try to do that already.' The young people we've worked with are saying states need to do more than try. They want to know why they're not being given regular visitation with their siblings, and they think foster parents need training to make sure those visits happen."

Although courts try to keep children together when they are taken away from their parents and placed in foster homes, "We forget that focus when siblings are separated," he said.

California is the only other state Foxhoven is aware of that has a sibling visitation law, and Iowa is the only one that will have foster children themselves lobbying for the proposed legislation, which he estimates has a 90 percent chance of passing.

Drake law students in the Legislative Practice Program drafted the bill and are meeting with legislative leaders to lobby for it. Rep. Kurt Swaim, D-Bloomfield, has introduced the bill (House File 480) in the House, where it has been referred to the Human Resources Committee. Although the companion bill in the Senate has not been finalized, Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal and Senate Minority Leader Mary Lundby have agreed to be co-sponsors of the measure, which also has garnered support from the Iowa Department of Human Services.

"I'm glad I was able to help facilitate this bill and I'm really enjoying being a part of the lobbying team," said Tracie Gibler, a third-year law student. "Talking to the legislators, getting support, meeting with the House and Senate leaders and staff from the Department of Human Services -- it's all coming together. I hope it shows the children in foster care that what they want does matter and that they should be vocal about other issues that concern them as well."

THE DAILY Reporter

Print this story

Friend of the Court plans amnesty day

Print Page

By Roland Stoy-Staff writer

COLDWATER — Get the word out.

Friend of the Court (FOC) of Branch County would like anyone who may be behind in child support to know an amnesty day is planned for Saturday, March 17, at the courthouse.

Jennifer Galloway of the FOC discussed the amnesty with members of the finance committee Tuesday and the rest of the county commissioners will be informed of this and other FOC matters this afternoon at their regular meeting at 4 p.m. in the courthouse boardroom.

The amnesty, between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. on that Saturday, is for parents who have failed to appear in court for show cause hearings related to why they neglected to pay their child support, including medical support obligations.

"Saturday was selected to accommodate working parents, and those who live out of the area," Galloway said.

She also said they are able to conduct the extraordinary hours due to money the state refunded the county from case surcharges.

This date is the only time this year that parents with outstanding bench warrants can appear at FOC and seek resolutions of the warrants, without the risk of being arrested or going to jail. In return, they must make a good faith payment of 10 percent of the outstanding arrears.

They must also provide an updated address, phone number, medical insurance status and employment information.

Payment may be made by money order, check or cash, and only cases being administered in this county will be handled.

A flyer that will be distributed countywide informs the public that "failure to take advantage of this amnesty day may result in a parent's arrest at an inopportune time and place. It may also result in a jail sentence of up to 90 days and additional costs associated with arrest and incarceration.

Inmates these days are charged \$30 a day for their time on ice.

The granting of amnesty only applies to bench warrants issued before March 17, 2007 and does not relieve anyone of the responsibility to pay past due, current or future child support.

Galloway said after March 17, FOC will pursue a concentrated effort to arrest individuals with outstanding child support warrants.

Questions regarding this program should be directed to the FOC at (517) 279-4314

The board this afternoon will also hear from committees and liaison assignments as they conduct their regular business.

The public is invited, and time is provided at the beginning and the end of the meeting for public comment.

Security is strictly enforced.

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Article published Feb 28, 2007

'Deadbeat' is wrong term for parents behind on child aid

A Feb. 15 editorial, "Program gives deadbeat dads a second chance," repeatedly uses the word "deadbeat" to refer to parents who have failed to pay child support. It's time to retire both the unfortunate expression "deadbeat dad" and its underlying stereotype: that parents, particularly fathers, don't pay child support because they don't care about their children.

The truth is that, more often than not, a parent who has fallen behind in support payments is not a "deadbeat" - he or she is simply "dead broke."

Unfortunately, a lot of noncustodial parents, usually fathers, end up in this situation because they don't attend the court hearing at which their child support obligation is determined. They think attendance is unwise because the "deck will be stacked" against them.

In fact, courts will order child support whether or not the parent is present at the hearing.

Without the parent's input, the court's estimate often is more than he or she can pay. Confronted with an excessive obligation, many parents who are otherwise willing to support their children simply give up trying to pay.

As a state, we need more initiatives which, like St. Clair's Jail Alternative Program, direct non-paying parents toward jobs and the ability to pay regular child support.

For those who truly can pay, but refuse to do so, the threat of jail time is appropriate.

Let's stop stigmatizing the entire group of delinquent payers, however, as "deadbeats" - it's unfair to them and to their children.

SUSAN BOROVICH

Director

Friend of the Court

St. Clair County

DANIEL WRIGHT

Director

Family Services Division

State Court Administrative Office

Lansing, Feb. 23



3 violent teens bolt youth home; two caught

By Mitch Hotts
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Three teens with a history of violent behavior bolted from the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center in Mount Clemens on Tuesday night, but police were able to apprehend two of the subjects.

A county spokesman said initial indications are the three escaped by pushing their way through a locked door about 8 p.m. at the center, located on North Rose behind the Macomb County Sheriff's Office on Elizabeth, near Groesbeck Highway.

"They had earned the right to make a phone call in an area near a secured door," said county spokesman Phil Frame. "How they got out is what we're trying to determine right now."

Macomb County Sheriff's deputies and Clinton Township police responded to the call and were able to quickly apprehend two of the escapees. A canine team was also involved in the pursuit, according to the sheriff's office.

As of 10:30 p.m., police were still searching fields and the immediate area around the youth home for the escapee who was described as a 16-year-old black Clinton Township resident, standing 5-foot-10 and weighing 170 pounds. He was wearing green scrubs that all youth home inmates wear.

"His offense was an assault case," Frame said. "I believe the other two young men who are back in custody also were in for assaults."

Local police did not immediately have details on the capture of the other two escapees.

The Macomb County of Commissioners authorized a \$19 million, two-phase renovation of the detention facility that began in June 2002.

The new juvenile center now operates out of an 81,000-square-foot facility that opened in September and has a current capacity of 60 males and 20 females.

The second phase, now under construction, calls for a 60,000-square-foot addition. The center has 83 full-time employees and 64 child care workers.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/022807/loc_youth001.shtml



4 boys still in custody on arson charges

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

The Grand Rapids Press

WYOMING -- Four of the five boys charged with arson for the blaze that heavily damaged the condemned Amsterdam Gardens apartment complex remain in juvenile detention and are scheduled for pretrial conferences in April.

Brothers Ladon Barrentine, 16, and Michael Barrentine, 15, Larry Parker, 15, and Cornelius Perry, 14, remain in custody on \$10,000 bonds. A fifth suspect, Charles Byrom, 15, posted bond, according to court records.

A sixth teen is charged with illegal entry and is not facing arson charges, said Doug Gaddy, intake supervisor for Kent County Family Court.

Wyoming Police arrested the teens last month after being tipped to the name of one of the suspects.

The teens told police they were goofing off in the abandoned apartment complex, 3003 Eastern Ave. SE, on Jan. 24 when they set a fire that got out of control.

When firefighters arrived, flames were shooting through the roof.

No one was injured in the fire, but the blaze caused \$750,000 in damage and firefighting costs.

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February 28, 2007

Texan Calls for Takeover of State's Juvenile Schools

By [RALPH BLUMENTHAL](#)

AUSTIN, Tex., Feb. 27 — A long-simmering scandal over sexual abuse of juveniles at schools for youthful offenders broke into the open on Tuesday with an outraged state senator calling for a takeover of the troubled [Texas](#) Youth Commission.

At a school in West Texas, a youth commission official acknowledged at a hearing of the State Senate Criminal Justice Committee, the school's superintendent was aware that two supervisors routinely awakened boys for late-night encounters behind closed doors in deserted offices.

The two supervisors — one of whom had been transferred from another state school after pornography was found on his work computer — were allowed to resign in 2005 without charges. One became the principal of a charter school in Midland, Tex., state officials said. The superintendent was promoted to director of juvenile corrections, a post he still holds, the youth commission confirmed.

"It's outrageous," said State Senator John Whitmire, chairman of the Criminal Justice Committee, who accused the commission of a cover-up.

Neil Nichols, the commission's general counsel and new acting executive director, named on Friday after the director, Dwight Harris, retired under pressure, voiced some contrition, saying at one point, "To say I'm disappointed about that is to say the least."

Mr. Whitmore, Democrat of Houston, was not mollified. "Why should this agency not be put in conservatorship and get a whole new management?" he asked.

He excoriated the commission board for not attending the hearing and canceled an appropriations session for the agency that had been scheduled for Wednesday.

Gov. [Rick Perry, a Republican](#), called the revelations "absolutely reprehensible" and would not rule out a takeover, said a spokesman, Ted Royer. "The governor believes any time a very serious issue like this emerges, every option should be on the table," Mr. Royer said.

Accusations that staff members at the West Texas State School in Pyote (pronounced PIE-oht) were sexually preying on youths there were made to the youth commission as early as December 2003, according to a timeline presented at the hearing.

The complaints did not reach the Texas Rangers until February 2005 and remained largely secret until accounts began appearing in recent weeks on the Web site of the Texas Observer and the pages of The Dallas Morning News.

The problems were widespread at the agency, which annually places some 3,000 juveniles ages 10 to 17 at the time of their felonies in 13 secure schools, senators and witnesses said.

State Senator Juan Hinojosa, Democrat of McAllen, who investigated conditions at another school in his South Texas district in 2005, said, "We found out a lot of youths are kept seven or eight months longer than required, and we want to know why."

Mr. Hinojosa added: "If a young person refuses to have sex with a supervisor, they deduct a point and are required to stay longer."

At another state school in Brownwood in Central Texas, he said, "A supervisor was accused of having sex with a 15-year-old juvenile" — a girl, he said later. It was turned over to the Brownwood police, he said, "with no action — it was covered up."

Mr. Nichols, the acting director, said the commission investigated 1,300 cases of reported wrongdoing last year, including 98 cases of reported sexual abuse. In 78 of the cases, he said, staff members were fired or resigned.

"How about prosecuted?" Mr. Hinojosa asked.

Mr. Nichols did not say. But he said a "large number" of the 78 cases involved female staff members of the commission who had improper sexual contact with students, male and female.

Senators questioned Mr. Nichols about the transfer in 2003 of one supervisor, Ray Brookins, to the West Texas State School from another school for juvenile offenders at San Saba, after pornography had been found on his computer. Mr. Brookins later became assistant superintendent at Pyote and was cited by the Texas Rangers for sexual contact with juveniles there, senators said.

Another supervisor at Pyote, John Paul Hernandez, was also reported by the Texas Rangers to have engaged in sexual contact with students, senators said.

Both supervisors left the youth agency and are under investigation, said the Ward County district attorney, Randall Reynolds.

Mr. Brookins was said at the hearing to be working at a bar in Austin.

Mr. Hernandez became principal at a charter school in Midland, the Richard Milburn Academy, said Norman Hall, the school's superintendent. The school did not know of Mr. Hernandez's history when it hired him, Mr. Hall said, and put him on leave several weeks ago.

Mr. Hernandez did not return a call to his mobile phone.

The superintendent at Pyote, Chip Harrison, who knew of the accusations against Mr. Brookins and Mr. Hernandez and kept them on the staff, senators said, is now director of juvenile corrections for the commission, in charge of several schools.

"That's intolerable; that's unacceptable," Mr. Whitmire said.

Mr. Nichols called him "one of our most experienced superintendents," setting off a gasp from parents.

Mr. Harrison did not return a call.

Randall Chance, a former inspector general at the Pyote school and the author of a self-published book, "Raped by the State," said abuses were often covered up. "They're not a problem at the T.Y.C. unless you bring it up" Mr. Chance said, "and then you're the problem."

Healthy proposals for tackling care costs George's plan pairs well with Granholm's

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Health care costs are eating up the state budget, pummeling private employers who provide health insurance and draining families without insurance. While Gov. Jennifer Granholm is seeking federal waivers to get her Michigan First health care plan off the ground, state Senate Republicans, joined by some Democrats, are offering their own ideas for expanding health care in Michigan for low-income people without health care coverage, and for encouraging healthier lifestyles.

State Sen. Tom George, R-Texas Township, is a physician. He has introduced a bill that would tackle health care costs, according to an analysis from the Senate Fiscal Agency, in a number of ways:

- ☐ Use Medicaid funds to create incentives - including expanded benefits and incentives involving premiums, co-pays - for those who participate in health risk assessments and screenings, comply with medical treatment, attend scheduled medical appointments, participate in programs to quit smoking, exercise and get prenatal care and immunizations.
- ☐ Create pay-for-performance incentives for Medicaid health maintenance organizations that meet goals for increasing the number of patients who practice positive health behaviors.
- ☐ Provide financial support for electronic health records, which would include personal health records and Web-based medical records.
- ☐ Ask, in any federal Medicaid waiver request, for the Michigan Department of Community Health to establish the incentives program.

But, wait, there's more. George said that last week additional health care proposals will be introduced:

- ☐ A resolution would encourage the governor to negotiate with state employees for health care incentives for healthy behaviors. Meanwhile, the Senate could include healthy behaviors incentives in its own health care coverage.
- ☐ If the federal waiver for Granholm's Michigan First plan is approved, legislation would allow private carriers to offer inexpensive health insurance that would cap annual benefits at between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a year. Although it wouldn't cover catastrophic medical treatment, it would cover more basic health care, like checkups and treatment of chronic illness.
- ☐ Allow businesses bidding on state contracts to factor into their bids any costs related to employee health care coverage offering incentives for healthy behavior.
- ☐ Require schools to provide physical education in kindergarten through the fifth grade.

□ Allow parents of grown children to continue to purchase health insurance for them, through the age of 26.

George said he has bipartisan support for his plan, which he said will dovetail with what Granholm is already working on with Michigan First. "We're not fighting her in this," he said.

Although some health care initiatives have stalled in the past, we hope that George's proposals will get a proper hearing.

If successful, many of the measures could chip away at many of the kinds of behaviors and lifestyles that make health care more expensive down the road.

Kalamazoo Gazette

MIHEART Bills Introduced

MIRS, February 27, 2007

Senate Republicans introduced their MIHEART plan, which would embrace the governor's MI First Healthcare plan and add incentives to reduce premiums and co-pays.

The governor's MI First Healthcare plan aims to give the state's 500,000 poorest citizens access to healthcare. The Republican plan, which was introduced last week, adds incentives for MI First recipients to take care of themselves.

Senate Republicans introduced their plan last week (See "[Senate GOP On Board With Healthcare For Poor](#)," 2/20/07).



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Denial of same-sex benefits weakens the entire social fabric

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

BY LINDA DIANE FELDT

My heart sank when I saw the headline on the Michigan Court of Appeals decision to stop health benefits for same-sex partners. I immediately thought of friends and neighbors whose lives will be in upheaval because of this decision. Parents who will have to return to work and give up being stay-at-home moms or dads if their partner can't provide them with coverage. Same-sex partners with emotional and physical disabilities who will be cut off cold from health care benefits they must have to survive. Now more people in Michigan will have to struggle to find health insurance, risking financial and physical devastation from a simple accident or illness.

When this "marriage" proposal was being debated, we were assured by the proponents it would not be used to take benefits away from loving families and children. Yet, this is exactly what has happened and with the blessings of the sponsors of the ballot proposal. This action directly attacks thousands of families in Michigan - men, women and children - in an area where we are all vulnerable.

Our health care system is broken and the numbers of uninsured hurts all of us, but the Michigan court's decision depriving a whole segment of our diverse community from simple access to health care is cruel and can only result in hurting more people. As a self-employed person, I know how hard it is to get private insurance. I have been without insurance most of my adult life because of ineligibility and a price tag rising so fast I couldn't keep up with it. So far, I've been lucky. Before that luck runs out I need to find a solution I can afford and that gives me some security without costing me such a large percentage of my income. I don't wish anyone to be in this position.

Personal benefits, partner benefits and spousal benefits are certainly part of the enticements to agreeing to employment and staying in a job. They also help our society and culture. Families can choose to devote time to child care if a partner or spouse can provide health care for the whole family. They also provide a greater degree of safety and security - if one person in the relationship is injured or ill, a liberal benefit package helps that family through a difficult time. The long-term result? Better access to health care, stronger families and a far decreased chance of financial hardship and the need to the rest of us to pick up the costs through social programs.

I've known of more than one same-sex partnership where access to health care because of the partner made all the difference. My friend who eventually died of cancer had fabulous care, but only because her partner worked at the University of Michigan, where benefits are extended to same-sex partners. If you want to take away health care benefits from same-sex partners, you are also advocating further harm and diminished care for people when they are most in need of support that their partners can no longer provide.

We need to be making access to health care easier, not taking it away. It is never right to put more adults and children at risk. We're setting up barriers so that only certain people can be secure.

It is indeed a sick society that seeks to punish and harm someone for who they are, for loving another person, regardless of the harm done to the children, their health, their financial security and their lives. These are real people affected by this cruel decision, and I am appalled that our state is casting them out from the small bit of shelter we have been able to offer and support with our tax dollars.

To contribute essays to Other Voices, contact Mary Morgan, opinion editor, at 734-994-6605 or mmorgan@annarbornews.com.

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Health care have-nots resent the haves

The issue of domestic partner benefits has been the subject of much debate in the Letters section. On Feb. 21, Ada T. Gardiner wrote to express her sympathy to Pam Gordon, but also reminded us that many people are not able to provide health coverage for others in their family.

Gardiner concluded her letter stating that Gordon's choices were her own responsibility and that she (Gardiner) should not be made to pay for Gordon's lifestyle choices.

Unfortunately, Gardiner's letter reveals the sad truth about how this issue has really divided us: We have become resentful of those who have health coverage or who have better health coverage than we do. In addition to complaining about our own lack of fair health coverage, many of us are also speaking out against those who have fair coverage, trying to pull them down instead of trying to pull everyone else up.

Instead of undermining each other, we should be standing by those with fair coverage and demanding that we, too, be given access to a system that lets us get coverage for our entire families, regardless of age, dependency status or sexual orientation.

Anna E. Nekola, Ann Arbor

Hetero marriage also

a 'choice' - so pay up

How many more ways are people going to justify denying health care insurance to same-sex partners? Recently, a letter writer claimed she was not obligated to support a lifestyle choice by providing same-sex partners health care insurance. Basically, because she had been unable to insure her 25-year-old college son and mother under her policy and would lose her own benefits in two years, she felt same-sex partners should tough it out on their own because theirs is a lifestyle choice.

Fine! Then let's REALLY level the playing field. Married heterosexual couples no longer should be entitled to the perks of marriage simply because they CHOOSE a married hetero lifestyle. Insurance (all forms); income tax breaks (state/federal/local); adoption rights; mortgage rate preferences; etc. should no longer be permitted to be conferred upon a married heterosexual. After all, they made the LIFESTYLE choice to be a married

heterosexual and I and everyone else - be they gay or not - should not have to subsidize YOUR lifestyle choice.

What a crock. How does one spell intolerance? Look in the mirror and don't move to Massachusetts. You might find your intolerance an anathema.

Not being gay, I cannot even come close to imagining how people in our community who ARE gay must be feeling about the intolerance being heaped upon them.

Catherine T. McGowan, Ann Arbor